1:Herskovits & Herskovits E-5 (1928-1929) 1934
583 Bush Negroes 583
Saramacca

609 mother. The woman who had made Bayo was her sister, she told us.

142 The resemblance between this woman and Bayo was marked. She had the same dark skin, the same stocky, muscular build, the broad nose, the same general cast of features we had known so well in Bayo. Similar, too, were the sharply etched scars on her face, which were so black and so prominent as to bespeak her great vitality and rugged health. There were other likenesses, we learned, and of these the most valued was the strength of their gods.

989 We had not been long in her hut before we noticed the 974 iron arm-band she wore. It was, we knew, a "*tapu*"—a 529 magical preventive which, in this instance, warned its wearer of danger, and kept her from harm in a combat. Seeing it on the arm of a woman was astonishing for many reasons. Not in all our encounters on the river had we seen a woman wearing an arm obia of iron. Iron was the sign of the Kromanti, a men's group, composed of those men [515] who had the Kromanti spirit. It was in part warriors' secret society, and in part, when it was Obia Kromanti, the men's religious society which controlled the powerful supernatural forces of preventive and healing magic which played so prominent a part in the spiritual life of the Bush Negro. Now there were, we had been told, some women who inherited the Kromanti spirit, but these were few, and not until after their menopause could they enter a Kromanti house, and when this came they were too old to participate in the dance, but they sang the songs when the spirit came to them and did whatever else was known to the initiated of their years.

But this woman who was Bayo's mother's sister was not an old woman. As she talked to us, in fact, her breast was [853] swung over to the side, and against her ribs was the head of the child on her back who was nursing. Yet on her arm was the fighter's "tapu," as the emblem of membership in the Kromanti group.

This was so important an anomaly that, following the etiquette of the bush, we hastened at once to talk about something else.

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562 828 [191] It is assumed once and for all that women are shrews on whom one cannot count and from whom one can get nothing. The Refugee Blacks are inexhaustible on this subject and their opinion about the women of their group is very similar to that of Africans in general: they call them ill-natured, devoid of feeling, selfish, greedy, and unfaithful.

562 571 [965] In general, women are held apart from regular social life; no form of customary society of women exists. In the mourning ceremonies, which correspond to a veritable mobilization of the village, they play no role, except to prepare the meals.

562 789 794 Yet the women play indirectly an important role in the social life by way of the cults of possession. The Papa gadu gods so formidable have women nearly exclusively as bearers, and we shall see in studying the functioning of the kunu that they are the principal actors in this. Through this activity, which is exerted in arbitrary fashion on the outskirts of the institutions of regular social life, the women maintain around themselves an atmosphere of fear; it is not impossible that the functioning of these cults is influenced by the concern of the women to maintain their privileged position in the society of the Refugee Blacks.

562 157 Many women are charitable and have a certain generosity toward the members of their family, insuring the maintenance of the old men without resources. But their benevolence is essentially subjective and extends only to a small circle of personal friends and their nearest relatives. As soon as the elders appeal to them for a question of general interest, claiming to give them orders or even advice, they meet an attitude systematically malevolent and stubborn. /70/

[613] The lineage heads avoid giving them orders directly, for they run a strong risk of getting themselves insulted, as we have observed many a time.

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The great gods Gwangwéla and Gédéosu of the Djuka are not known to the Boni.

Strictly speaking, no cult of Masa Gadu exists. No edifice is reserved for him, he has no priests, and no collective ceremonies are conducted on his behalf. He is nevertheless constantly present in the religious life of the Boni, associated with ancestor worship. Every ceremony of ancestor worship includes an invocation to Masa Gadu. From time to time, for specific motives such as the illness of a member of the lo, people go /195/ specially to the fraga tiki to invoke Masa Gadu. The oldest man of the lo officiates, while a younger one pours a little water and tafia at the foot of the fraga tiki; the elder addresses Masa Gadu in everyday language, in simple terms, in a familiar conversational tone, asking him for the cure of illnesses or the end of calamities. Those present, seated in a semicircle, punctuate the end of the speech with some rhythmical applause, uttering the ritual formula of thanks: "Gaã tẽgi tẽgi fi yu, Masa Gadu."

Outside of these ceremonies which hardly go beyond the framework of the lineage, everyone may address Masa Gadu directly by praying aloud, if, for example, he finds himself alone in the bush and prey to an illness. One never addresses Masa Gadu other than for a specific material purpose. Inner prayer for the purpose of spiritual perfection does not exist to our knowledge among the Refugee Blacks.

One applies directly to Masa Gadu when one believes oneself to be the victim of an iniquitous action (see curse). However, although the Refugee Blacks have a very lively sense of justice, they never call Masa Gadu to witness for the cruel and arbitrary vengeances (kuku) which the lower divinities are believed to exercise on them. It is taken for granted that all these divinities do conforms to the role which Masa Gadu has assigned to them and that the suffering they inflict on men is indispensable to the proper working of the universe.

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794 [181] The laws of Odun. The cult of Odun (Odŭ) is the keystone of the social and religious structure of the Refugee Blacks. It is a very secret cult; its rites are not practiced in the presence of outsiders and all curiosity about it meets with frank hostility. [123] The Boni, who talk rather freely about the cults of possession, are mute on the subject of Odun, and one may spend years among them without even hearing this name uttered.

794 184 The worship of Odun is common to the Boni and the Saramaka (perhaps this is what explains the trustful relations which exist between the two groupings). Among the Djuka it is replaced by the worship of Gwangwéla (Grantata), which has exactly the same functions and rites.

796 Odun is not to be confused with the creator God Nana (Masa Gadu). The myths explaining the relationship of these two entities were not known by our informants, but it is clear that Odun was sent to men by Masa Gadu as legislator and judge.

671 Odun's laws have a profound originality, as much by their content as by the sanctions which accompany them. It is not excessive to speak of a religious and moral doctrine of the Refugee Blacks.

[641] These laws appear in negative form. A certain number of acts and behavior are forbidden to those who have entered the society of the Refugee Blacks by taking an oath which binds them for good and all. 784 Offenders will be punished without the direct intervention of men, by the all-powerful action of Odun, who will kill them or /196/ strike them down with sicknesses. As a general rule, Odun's punishment is death; this is what explains the fear his name inspires.

673 [754] Odun forbids:

--Sorcery, wisi, in the most general sense, that is, any magic action having as its purpose the killing, making ill, and in a general way doing harm to another person.

/199 cont./

581 The Refugee Blacks change their attitude immediately as soon as one speaks to them about marriage. Men and women are unanimous in considering marriage as an intolerable violation of individual freedom and as a tie without purpose; they talk about it with veritable indignation, even having the feeling of an offense against morality.

Cults of Possession

787 794 The phenomena of possession are extremely frequent among the Blacks of America (possession by saints or inspiration by the Holy Spirit among the Blacks of Brazil and the United States, voodooism in Haiti). With the Refugee Blacks they make up the very base of religious life to the point of being the normal means of communication between the gods and men; they have profound effects on all social life.

The cults of possesion practiced by the Refugee Blacks of Guiana differ from those of the Blacks of Brazil and Haiti and do not appear to be directly connected with the African cults which have been described.

We shall give here only very concise information about the ritual of these cults and we shall mainly try to show their place in relation to the institutions of the Refugee Blacks, and their functioning.

787 Possession is believed to be the entrance into a man of a suprahuman entity (divinity, spirit of an ancestor) which, during a variable length of time generally rather short (a few minutes to several hours), uses the body of this man and expresses itself through his mouth. They say that the man has become the horse - hasi - of the divinity. They also say: "Such-and-such a divinity entered his head." The possessed person is called gadu mĩ (gadu umĩ for a woman). This word has been translated improperly as "priest" in the first works treating of the Refugee Blacks.

[789] [791] [796] [613] [784] /201 cont./
The elders then consulted the oracles and perceived that Mimi was victim of an Ampuku named Maogan which for a very long time had been pursuing the Kotika lineage with its vengeance (kunu). In order to protect herself, she sought to have herself given a more powerful god, and she became the pupil of an obiaman specialist in the cult of the Papa gadu. In this way she [782] had a Papa gadu named Ayaémé, divinity of beneficent character to which, in difficult cases, her family applies in order [346] to obtain advice, protection, and remedies. She had a little hut built beside her house, where the god goes to rest when it has finished each of its trips to the country of men. Ayaémé [784] imposed on Mimi its kina which concerns a fish. But even with all this she was not rid of her kunu of the Ampuku; and one day, something it had not yet done, the latter revealed itself in her [784] and spoke through her mouth. It announced that it would con- [782] tinue to exercise its kunu against the Kotika lineage. They appeased it by sacrifices of red cloth and beer; since then, it seems calm and in rather good humor. It comes into Mimi from time to time and speaks in Saramaka language. They are very afraid of it, but they do not hesitate to question it and ask it for remedies, which it sometimes indicates. It laid on Mimi three [784] gadu kina concerning the acouchy, the agami, and the armadillo.

[791] [787] [794] Organization of the cults of possession. Strictly speaking, no religious brotherhoods exist in Boni country; there are only teachers - bay(2) - who have received their power from another

2. It does not seem advisable to translate this word by "priest." In the minds of the Refugee Blacks, this is a matter of a teacher teaching pupils; they use the same word to designate a European or Creole schoolmaster.

/201 cont./
791 teacher and who teach a small group of disciples - kineki -,
787 without distinction of villages or lineages and under their sole
[794] responsibility; each one, man or woman, is absolutely free to pursue his teaching.

/202/ These teachers are not themselves possessed, but they are believed to know the processes which permit the neophyte to obtain possession with the minimum of risks. They accept the
[776] fact, however, that that involves dangers, for one cannot oblige a particular gadu to come into someone, and one may in its place obtain an undesirable gadu.

791 Procedures vary according to the categories of gadu sought.
787 But they involve three elements which are always found in one
776 form or another:

[798] --They begin by teaching the pupil the language of the divinity, or rudiments at the very least (as we shall point out further on, these languages appear to be in decline); these lessons are private;

[824] --On behalf of a group of pupils, the teacher prepares infusions of certain leaves which are suited to the divinity in question. It is thought that the god likes these plants and that they have the power to attract it.

[788] In certain cults it is required of the pupil to utter at the same time formulas inviting the god to come into him. But this is not general; in the cult of the Papa gadu especially, the teachers bathe the students in the greatest silence.

791 At the end of the session, the student is often asked to
787 drink a little of the infusion. One might believe that it is a
824 matter of a process having a physical action, certain plants possibly containing hypnotic substances; but except for one aspect of the cult of the Kumënti of which we shall speak later, this does not seem true; especially about the plants believed to attract the Papa gadu, it seems that they have received this role because of their color or odor. Our feeling is that, at least
[562] for the Papa gadu cult which appeals more especially to women, suggestion plays an essential part.

/205 cont./

276 613 428 [789] Still, they assume that the gods that have entered a matrilineage tend to be transmitted within this group. If, for example, a woman is possessed by a Papa gadu, at her death she must bequeath it in the same way as her property, and she can bequeath it only to someone of her lineage.

We have seen in studying the transmission of the god of Kotolda († 1956), that only the women of the Afi lineage to which she belonged could inherit.

796 613 984 Even if the god is not bequeathed, which sometimes happens, if it exercises the kunu, it will manifest itself sooner or later in a member of the lineage. But long years may pass before it shows itself. This conception is absolutely clear to the Refugee Blacks, and furthermore, if it did not exist, the [114] [428] idea of the kunu would be without support. People have therefore wrongly believed in a transmission of gods from father to son.

346 789 ● 794 613 Material organization of cults. A material organization of the cults of possession exists within the limits of the localized lineage (lo). This organization is completely independent of the apprenticeship of these cults. It permits the members of the lineage to easily practice cults they have received anywhere, on their own responsiblity.

In each lo there exists in general one single chapel (obia ɔsu) for all the divinities of the same category.

For example in the Awara Bakka lo quarter in Asisi (140 persons), for about 15 women having a Papa gadu, there exists only a single one. There is an obia ɔsu for the Ampuku (three or four possessed persons) and another for the Kumenti (about ten possessed people).

The chapel of the Papa gadu is placed under the responsibility of the head of the lo. On this subject it is to be noted that the individualized lineages Aw. B, 3 and Afi, which however have separate gods, are included in this organization.

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346 794 787 613 The objects placed in these chapels are simply the clothing, beverage, and tools of the gods when they come to visit men; they correspond nearly to what the Refugee Blacks leave in a farming habitation where they go to work regularly. For [293] example, in the Papa gadu ɔsu of the Awara Bakka quarter of Asisi, which serves for about 15 gods, each one has a definite place on the shelves to lay out especially the scarf which serves it as a garment and a bottle of beer (a bottle is always kept in readiness by the bearer of the god) (1).

1. The Papa gadu do not like tafia. If the usual bearer of one of these gods has drunk tafia, it cannot come into him.

[534] They still stow the Papa dɔ́ drum in this chapel. This drum, like the chapel itself, is believed to belong to the Papa gadu god which first came into a member of the lineage to exercise the kunu. In the example mentioned of the Awara [428] /206/ Bakka lo of Asisi, in 1957 it was the centenarian grandmother Kuluba who had borne this god since her youth, having herself received it, by several successive transmissions, from a distant ancestress.

[621] In villages like Boniville and Papaïston where fragments of lineage of entirely different origins coexist, each has its own organization.

For example in Boniville there is a Papa gadu ɔsu for the fragment of the Lapé lineage (it belongs to Térésa whose god exercises the kunu on this lineage). The fragment of the lineage has another.

In Papaïston the Tolna (Lɔ́mbuchi) lineage, reduced to half a dozen persons, has a Papa gadu ɔsu of its own.